



U.S. Marine Corps aviator Lieutenant John Hanes lands his Corsair at Kimpo airfield outside of Inchon after being hit by enemy ground fire, September 18, 1950. Marine infantry saw Hanes' plane in trouble and cleared the airfield of enemy forces moments before the plane landed.



A Marine Corps Corsair from squadron VMF-14 prepares for a Korean War airstrike aboard USS *Sicily*, November 1950. The weapons on the underside of the plane's wings are High Velocity Aircraft Rockets, or HVARs. First used in 1944 to blow up German Panzers and pillboxes, HVARs were powerful air to ground weapons that could penetrate up to four feet of concrete.

It was a startling headline in the dawning of the jet age and an era that witnessed the breaking of the sound barrier—"KOREA NO PLACE FOR JETS!" The accompanying article highlighted the burden borne by tried and true propeller-driven aircraft in the early weeks of the Korean War. Foremost among them was the F4U Corsair, which was part of all but two carrier combat deployments and equipped seven Marine squadrons that flew from airfields throughout South Korea.

Why did an airplane that first appeared on the drawing boards during the Great Depression have such a monumental impact on one of the first battlegrounds of the Cold War? While first-generation jets like the F9F Panther and F2H Banshee were faster, they had "short legs" in the parlance of naval aviators, which meant their range, and by extension time on target, was limited.

In addition, these early jets had the combination of being heavier and underpowered compared to their prop counterparts, which made them difficult to get airborne with the catapults of the day and prevented them from carrying much ordnance. Though jets increased their air-to-ground capabilities by the end of the war, it largely fell to propeller-driven aircraft to "move mud" against targets on the ground.

In Korea the inverted gull wings of the Corsair that inspired the nickname "U-Bird" were as welcome a sight for Marines on the ground as they had been for those on beachheads during World War II. Describing a series of assaults against enemy positions near the Naktong River in 1950, a newspaper reporter wrote, "A cheer went up from dusty, bloody men lying in the hollow as the foot of Hill 1 as F4U Corsairs roared in low. They raked the hill with rocket and cannon bursts."

By the time of the armistice in July 1953, Navy and Marine Corp F4Us had logged nearly 40% of the combat missions flown by all Naval aircraft in the skies over Korea, a stellar record for one of naval aviation history's most storied aircraft.

Author: Hill Goodspeed at the National Naval Aviation Museum

Corsairs Over Korea

Loaded with rockets and bombs, a Corsair from squadron VF-214 prepares to take off USS *Boxer* (CV 21) and into the Korean war zone, September 1950.

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